Called a Liar, Sirhan Flies Into Tantrum

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LOS ANGELES, April 1—Called a liar from the witness stand, Sirhan Bishara Sirhan interrupted his murder trial today with a shouting, fist-pounding tantrum.

Superior Court Judge Herbert V. Walker demanded, and got, an apology in open court from the 25-year-old Arab, reportedly as the price for not binding and gagging him.

The temperamental defendant's outburst came in the midst of damaging prosecution testimony that he was suffering no delusions when he assassinated Sen. Robert F. Kennedy in the Ambassador Hotel last June.

The witness, psychiatrist Seymour Pollack, added that he put no stock in Sirhan's claims that he could remember nothing of his written threats to kill Kennedy. They were found scattered through notebooks at his Pasadena home after the shooting.

Skeptically, Dr. Pollack pointed out that Sirhan has professed an inability to remember writing down even the most innocuous entries in the same notebooks, such as material from his courses at Pasadena City College.

'Blanket Denial'

The grey-haired psychiatrist called Sirhan's claims a "blanket denial" that he found impossible to accept as "genuine amnesia."

Rather, Dr. Pollack said, "It reflects an attempt to avoid the serious significance that would be attributed to these writings . . . evidence of planning and premeditation."

Sirhan cut the doctor off in midsentence, jumping to his feet and shouting at Judge Walker: "Your Honor, sir . . ."

Inspector William Conroy, the chief of security for the trial, and two deputies grabbed Sirhan by the shoulders and shoved him back down into his chair.

He sat there, shaking his head, pounding his fist on a table and murmuring "no . . . no" in muffled protest.

"You settle down or I'll do what I told you I was going to do," Judge Walker told him sternly.

The Judge excused the jury for a 15-minute recess and sent Sirhan to his "holding tank" next to the courtroom to cool off.

Sirhan Reaction

Chief defense investigator Michael A. McCowan, who accompanied him, said later that Sirhan told him: "I told the truth and I don't want him (Pollack) to call me a (obscenity) liar."

Judge Walker, meanwhile, held a conference with attorneys for both sides. Defense counsel Emile Zola Berman told reporters the Judge was talking "more seriously about restraints" for Sirhan and wanted, at the least, an apology in the courtroom.

It was delivered by attorney Russell L. Parsons when both Sirhan and his jurors had filed back into the courtroom.

Parsons said Sirhan "could not control himself" at being called a liar. "He was thrown completely off balance."

Sirhan's advisers insisted that he wasn't faking, but the episode remained shot through with the ambivalence that has characterized much of the trial. Earlier in the morning, Sirhan had been smiling delightedly as Dr. Pollack told the courtroom why he did not consider the young assassin genuinely psychotic.

Paranoid Traits

Calling the assessment his "very strong and firm clinical opinion," the psychiatrist said Sirhan had a "paranoid personality" but he noted that paranoid traits — feelings of persecution, resentment and distrust—are present "in all of us to some degree."

"The big question," as Dr. Pollack put it, was whether Sirhan was suffering from psychotic delusions that would put him beyond the pale.

Sirhan, he testified, believed that "Sen. Kennedy was a bad person, that he was anti-Palestinian Arab, that the American Jews were supporting the Zionist cause, that the U.S. Government was a politically hypocritical setup, and that politicians are opportunists.

"Although I don't share those beliefs," Dr. Pollack went on, "at least not to the extent Sirhan did, there are a large number of people in the United States and elsewhere who do."